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### THEIR SHARE OF THE GLORY Rutland Blacks in the Civil War



COURTESY, COMPANY OF MILITARY HISTORIANS

*Enlisted Man, 54th Massachusetts Regiment  
1863-1865*

# **Rutland Blacks in the 54th Massachusetts Regiment Their Share of the Glory**

by Don Wickman

On the night of 12 April 1861 Confederate cannon opened fire on Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor. After a brave defense Major Richard Anderson lowered the fort's flag in surrender and the Confederates took control of the brick bastion. The Civil War had begun and would continue over the next four years with relentless fury.

The news of Sumter's fall ignited a fire across the northern states. Men flocked to volunteer for military duty, eager to battle the Confederates. Vermonters were also included in this intense war fever. By early May the 1st Vermont Regiment had departed the state for the south and the call to arms was issued to raise additional regiments. The call was answered and ranks filled with men both young and old, and rich and poor, from all trades and professions. But these soldiers who were enlisting in a war where a prime issue was slavery were all white. Northern blacks could not enlist. Not until after 1 January 1863 was it possible for blacks to serve as regular soldiers, and serve they did. Vermont sent 120 black soldiers off to war, 71 of whom served in the 54th Massachusetts (Colored) Volunteer Regiment. Over 25% of those men enlisted from Rutland. This is the account of their "glory".

## **Rutland in 1861**

In 1861 Rutland was a growing town with developing industry. It was not just Rutland City, but encompassed all the land of present day Proctor, West Rutland, Rutland Town, and Rutland City. The railroad bisected the town and a major rail yard was growing. As rail activity increased the commercial center of Rutland shifted from Main Street to Merchants Row and Center Street.

The census of 1860 recorded over 7500 residents in Rutland. This was a 100% increase in the population since the census of 1850. Rutland was a successful, flourishing community.

Of those 7500 people listed in the 1860 census 92 blacks were among the population. This number represented nearly 10% of the total black population in all of Vermont. One common misconception is these blacks were products of the underground railroad which ran through Vermont. Census records show the heads of households and spouses were primarily born in Vermont. Black heritage in Vermont was not new, only forgotten.

Within the community was Cato Williams and family, including sons, John and Cyrus; young farmer John Langley and his new wife, Caroline; teamster Nathan Hayes dwelling in Center Rutland with his wife and daughters; William Scott, his wife and five children, among whom was his son, George; and many others. Some like Langley farmed, others were laborers; another segment served as servants, cooks, or domestics. They were a part of Vermont's population,

but when Fort Sumter fell they could be only bystanders to America's bloodiest conflict.

## **Emancipation!**

Why had blacks not been permitted to join the ranks? After all, those free blacks had rights of other U.S. citizens. Why exclude this segment of the population? The reasons were both political and stereotypical. Lincoln was counseled early in the war that should he permit the enlistment of black soldiers, citizens in the already shaky border states and some northern states would withdraw their support for the war. Some state governments were not ardent abolitionists, but saw the Civil War necessary for preservation of the union. The raising of black troops would alter priorities and support for the war could erode.

There was also the basic stereotype of the black man in the 1860s. Though there were blacks who were respected and well-educated, many people believed blacks were lazy, ill-disciplined, and did not possess the courage or spirit to fight. The job of common laborer was their best profession and as one white Ohioan shouted early in the war, "This is a white man's war!"<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, the war for the union was not proceeding well. Lincoln realized the abolition of slavery was essential to the winning of the war and drafted the Emancipation Proclamation, planning it to go into effect January 1863. However, Lincoln chose not to announce the proclamation until a significant Union victory had been won.

The victory Lincoln sought came on the banks of Antietam Creek in Maryland on 17 September 1862 where McClellan's Army of the Potomac fought Lee and his Army of Northern Virginia to a draw. Though not a clearcut victory, it did serve to blunt Lee's advance northward, and with victories in the east difficult to come by, it had to suffice. The Emancipation Proclamation was made public. Hundreds of Union troops chose to desert rather than serve side by side with blacks, but now there was the opportunity for blacks to enlist and fight.

## **The 54th Massachusetts Regiment**

With emancipation declared, the door opened for blacks to serve in the Union army. In South Carolina ex-slaves were formed into the first black regiment; other units soon followed in Louisiana and Kansas. The officers of these regiments were all white.

In January 1863 Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew decided to raise a colored regiment. The Federal War Department agreed to the strongly abolitionist state raising the regiment and recruiting began feverishly. A general misconception about the 54th Massachusetts (Colored) Regiment is that the soldiers were primarily runaway slaves. Though true for those regiments raised in the south, it was not the case of the 54th. These volunteers were free men and often literate, well-educated, and from worthy professions. The 54th had the distinction of being the first black regiment raised in the north and recruits came to

Massachusetts from every northern state and Canada to support the venture. Twenty-six year old Robert Gould Shaw, son of a Boston abolitionist and already a veteran of several battles, was appointed regimental colonel. All other officers selected for duty in the regiment were white.

After intense drill at Readville Camp outside of Boston, the 54th was mustered into the Union army and left Boston to a resounding sendoff. Governor Andrew envisioned the 54th not only as a fighting regiment, but also a “nest egg of a brigade” of black regiments. Andrew believed the arrival of the 54th in the Carolinas would be a rallying point for blacks in the region and a start for further enlistments of blacks into the army, thus increasing troop strength. He was also adamant in his letters that the 54th was, “raised and officered for active not fatigue duty . . . and allowed a place in onward and honorable movements of active war.”<sup>2</sup>

In early June 1863 the regiment arrived in South Carolina as part of the force besieging Charleston. Active duty initially was limited to manual labor around the camp. However, on 16 July part of the regiment made a successful defense on James Island where it was responsible for saving the white 10th Connecticut Regiment from capture and destruction. The 54th was now a veteran unit and earned the respect of fellow soldiers.

Charleston, South Carolina, was a city ringed with fortifications. One of these, Fort Wagner on Morris Island, required capture as it commanded ground essential for Union advancement. A work composed of high sand walls, a moat, and protected by water and cannon, it was nearly impregnable. Once already it had defied Union onslaught, but the generals elected to try again rather than lay a siege. The 54th, with young Shaw at the head of the regiment, would lead the attack.

On the night of 18 July 1863 the 54th advanced, followed by two brigades of white troops. Charging through vicious fire the 54th gained the parapet only to have Shaw killed and his body fall into the fort. Fire thinned the officer ranks, but for an hour the troops maintained their position. The supporting regiments gallantly charged, but were also defeated and all that remained at sunrise were mounds of dead and wounded.

Of the 600 men led by Shaw that July evening 50 percent were either killed, wounded, or captured. The result of such terrible losses proved to the north that black troops were not cowardly, but capable of fighting and dying valiantly for a cause.

The siege of Charleston continued.

## **The Military Draft Comes to Rutland**

While the 54th Massachusetts was being recruited, the war was still not proceeding well for the north. Battles at Fredericksburg and Stones River created enormous casualty lists which affected cities and towns alike. The initial excitement

of war diminished and enlistments dropped considerably. Men were needed to fill the dwindling ranks and Congress passed legislation establishing the first military draft. All able-bodied men, whether black or white, between the ages of 25 and 45 were eligible. The draft would go into effect on 1 July 1863.

Several weeks later the selection process began in Rutland. It was a lottery where names were drawn and a ranking created. Men were exempted if they failed the physical examination, fulfilled other criteria for exemption, or procured a substitute to serve in their place. A substitute was paid \$300 and although it was a common practice in the northern states, it was not popular in Vermont.

After the draft concluded, three Rutland black men were off to war. John N. Langley, the twenty-five year old farmer was one, and brothers William H. and James J. Brooks were also selected. Rutland contributed \$100 compensation towards each man who had a family, to ease the suffering at home.

Since Vermont did not have any black units, the three men were mustered in and ordered to join the 54th Massachusetts on the South Carolina coast. In the company of other black draftees the men arrived at Morris Island on 29 November 1863 and were immediately placed in the ranks.

## **Another Call for Volunteers**

The draft helped to fill the ranks, but more men were needed. A second draft was ordered for the beginning of 1864, but volunteers would be initially accepted. Towns were informed they needed to fill a certain quota of volunteers by 5 January 1864. If the number was not met by the deadline, the draft would be instituted to make up the difference, plus an additional number of men would be drafted. Towns scrambled for methods to secure volunteers so a draft could be avoided.

Since the hunt for glory was no longer a lure for men to enlist, the next solution was money. Already the federal government was offering a \$302 bounty per enlistment and the state added \$125 more. Even with this large sum of money volunteers were not forthcoming.

The towns desperately wanted to reach their quotas. As enlistments were proceeding slowly, Rutland held a town meeting to examine its options. After debate it was voted to offer a \$500 town bounty for each man enlisting above and beyond the federal and state bounties. A new recruit could earn \$927 for signing enlistment papers. A special town tax was also passed to help defray the \$65,000 expense of all the bounties.

Non-residents could also enlist and help fulfill the town quota. The additional \$500 was an attraction. As "bounty jumping" was becoming prevalent, the town in passing the bounty stated non-residents would only receive \$300 at the time of enlistment, the remaining \$200 balance six months later. According to the local paper, "The object of this modification, . . . was to guard against desertions, and to secure *bona fide* soldiers."<sup>3</sup>

With such a grand bounty being offered, volunteers came forward quickly. Both black and white men signed up. By 14 December, the *Rutland Herald* wrote, "Ten colored volunteers have enlisted in Rutland."<sup>4</sup> These recruits were: George Hart, Nathan Hayes, Henry Jackson, Loudon Langley, Andrew Mero, James Quow, George William Scott, and Cyrus and John Williams.

On 28 December the *Herald* would write, "No draft here," as the town quota was met a week before the federal deadline.<sup>5</sup> Seven more blacks had enlisted over those two weeks. They were: Francis Anthony, Royal Briggs, John Freeman, William Jackson, Charles Mero, George Storms, and John Weeks. Seventeen black volunteers prepared to set off for war.

Many of these seventeen were related. There were two sets of brothers: John and Cyrus Williams and Andrew and Charles Mero. William and George Scott were father and son. James Quow was a brother-in-law to John Williams. Loudon Langley had two other brothers enlist concurrently from Ferrisburgh, and Royal Briggs had a younger brother already in the 54th, a draftee from Castleton. At least five of the men were married and the average age was twenty-seven.

The new volunteers immediately set off to the Brattleboro rendezvous to join other new recruits. At the camp they were viewed by one of Vermont's United States Senators, Jacob Callomer. He said of the colored volunteers, "I would mention one thing as showing the character of the men: every man among them wrote his name to his articles of enlistment; not one made his mark. There was no man among them but could have commanded his two dollars a day at home."<sup>6</sup> The men left Brattleboro for Boston, but were forced temporarily to leave behind Cyrus Williams, who had contracted typhoid fever. At Boston the recruits boarded a steamer which arrived at Folly Island, South Carolina, on 20 January 1864. The men were now part of the 54th Massachusetts and began to be integrated into the companies.

## Olustee

The Rutland men arrived just in time to be part of an expedition to Florida. The strategy was to capture a coastal port, cut off enemy supply routes, and "try" to restore Florida to the Union. The regiment set out in early February with the new recruits. The exception was John Freeman. Freeman was in the Hilton Head Hospital where he died of disease on 15 February.

The Union force landed at Jacksonville and advanced across the state toward Tallahassee. Colonel Edward Hallowell commanded the 54th. The Confederates had set up their defensive line at Olustee, a small train stop along the cross-state railroad. The land was filled with pine barrens and swamps. Union General Seymour advanced holding the 54th in reserve. The Union forces attacked the Confederate lines, but then began to break under a fierce counterattack. The 54th was ordered to advance and stabilize the left flank. The regiment arrived in time to blunt the assault and then stood alone under intense fire as the Union line crumbled in disorder. Finally, orders arrived to fall back

and the 54th served as the army's rear guard while it retraced its route to Jacksonville.

The army was soundly defeated, but the 54th earned more plaudits for its stubborn defense among the pines. During the combat three Rutland men were wounded: William H. Brooks, in the hip; Henry P. Jackson, in the shoulder; and William Scott, in the head. None of the wounds would prove mortal, but Brooks convalesced for several months in the hospital.

The regiment returned to South Carolina in mid-April.

## **Operations in 1864 and Early 1865**

The 54th again took up positions around Charleston as the siege continued. For the next seven months the regiment was broken up in detachments of battalions or companies to serve as garrison troops or prison guards. Confederate prisoners were extremely distraught at having to be guarded by black troops. Seven companies made an unsuccessful advance on James Island on 2 July, but, after exposure to a persistent Confederate bombardment, were forced to fall back to their original lines. Charleston held on. In late November the 54th Regiment, except Companies B and F, left the Charleston region for operations south of the city.

On November 30 the Union force advanced on Confederate earthworks situated on Honey Hill, South Carolina. The position was quite strong and defied several assaults. The 54th was again in place as the rear guard, but was ordered forward. Its advance, like the other regiments, was stymied.

Though unsuccessful at Honey Hill, operations continued in the region between Charleston and Savannah, Georgia. Sherman's advance was closing in on Savannah and the work of the Union force of which the 54th was a part disrupted troop and supplies heading to Savannah's relief. Sherman captured Savannah in late December and the 54th once again headed back to Charleston.

## **Charleston's Fall**

The noose thrown around Charleston had finally tightened. Orders for its evacuation were issued and by 17 February the city was desolate; empty of defenders, most of its citizens, and supplies. Flames appeared as warehouses and bridges were destroyed. The first Union troops entered the city on the 17th and on the 18th the long detached Companies B and F of the 54th became the initial black troops to enter the city proper. The remainder of the 54th arrived in Charleston on 27 February and joined the two companies. Captain Luis Emilio of Company E wrote, "We could not be exultant, for by day and night, in sunshine and storm, through close combat and far-reaching cannonade, the city and its defenses were the special objects of our endeavor for many months."<sup>7</sup> For the men of the 54th it was a long time coming since the night assault of 18 July 1863.

Their time in Charleston was not long as the 54th embarked for Savannah on 8 March. Savannah was not as damaged as Charleston and the regiment spent

a pleasant three weeks of garrison duty before being ordered to Georgetown, South Carolina, for its final campaign. The war might have been drawing to a close, but was not yet over.

What transpired on that final campaign is best described by Lt. Colonel Henry Hooper in his report to the Adjutant General of Massachusetts.

April 27th 1865

The army under the command of Brig. Genl. Potter left Georgetown on the 5th inst. and marched that day North Westerly, parallel with the Black River Eighteen miles. On the 6th marching in the same direction it made twenty miles. On the 7th two companies of the 54th under charge of Captain Tucker made a reconnaissance to Epps' Bridge on the Black River. Captain Tucker found the bridge destroyed—casualties 2d Lieut. Fred B. Rogers and two men wounded. We made nineteen miles on that day and Eighteen miles on the 8th. On the 9th we marched twenty three miles fought the enemy at Dingle's Mill, the defensive point of Sumterville, capturing three pieces of artillery. The enemy's defeat resulted in the occupation of Sumterville by our forces. In this action the 54th formed a part of a flanking column, but did not get into action. The enemy's cavalry discovering the flank movement made good its escape.

The army remained at Sumterville until the 11th when it marched westerly to Manchester Station on the Wilmington Rail Road twelve miles distant. The 54th left the main column at this point and went down the rail road six miles to the Wateree Junction. Here the regiment charged across a trestle work bridge and seized three trains of cars. The steam was up in the locomotives but our movement was too sudden to allow the engineers to move off the trains. The men attached to the trains escaped by precipitating themselves from the embankment into the swamp.

A party was sent in a westerly direction on the trestle work of the main rail road. After proceeding about three miles it succeeded in capturing three trains of cars with locomotives attached. By working the night throughout eight locomotives and forty-eight cars were destroyed, and on each of the three rail roads at the Junction trestle work was destroyed and bridges were burned. Casualties 2d Lieut. Stephen A. Swails wounded in the arm, and two men injured while coupling cars. The regiment then returned to the main column reaching it at 7:30 A.M. of the 12th.

We remained at Singleton's Plantation about two miles north of Manchester Station, until the afternoon of the 15th when the column marched northerly towards Camden. During the afternoon skirmishers engaged the enemy in the front till nightfall. when suddenly leaving the direct road to Camden, we turned and marched in an easterly direction. Our march ended about 1 o'clock A.M. on the 16th we having accomplished about fifteen miles.

During the 16th the enemy was formed in our front but gave way rapidly before the skirmishers. We made about twenty miles this day. Casualties this day, one man killed and one wounded while foraging. On the 17th although the enemy endeavored to check our advance, we made sixteen miles and marching over the classic ground of Camden entered that town at nightfall.

It was discovered at Camden the railroad trains had been sent down the Camden Rail Road during our advance from Singleton's. Early in the morning of the 18th we turned our force southward and marching upon the railroad



and upon the Statesburgh road which runs along the line of the railroad crossing it here and there began the final march for the rolling stock of the railroads of this section of the State.

This day the enemy's efforts to check our advance were more determined than heretofore. The positions which he took up for defence were far better adapted to that purpose than was any he had before occupied during our march. About eight miles from Camden our advance was checked on the Statesburgh road at Swift's Creek. The 54th was ordered to cross this creek at some point to the right of the road in order to flank the enemy who were opposite the head of the column.

We moved down the creek over ploughed fields that bordered the woods of the swamp. Contrabands stated that the swamp was impassable at any nearer point to the Statesburgh road than Boykins Mill which were two miles distant.

As we approached the side of the mills the enemy's scouts were found, whom the skirmishers dispersed. Nothing definite could be learned of the crossing at the Mills, although we approached to the very bank of the stream, until a skirmish line was pushed through the dense undergrowth into the face of the enemy who lay concealed about sixty yards distant on the opposite bank of the creek. This primary movement resulted in one man killed and five wounded.

It was discovered that the mills were upon two streams connected above by a dyke; one hundred and fifty yards below was a road running at right angle to the dyke, the stream making a sharp end between the dyke and road. This road crossed the two streams; the first by a bridge or rather by one stringer the boards having been removed, the second by a ford waist deep. About fifteen yards beyond the ford up a sharp ascent, was a breastwork of cotton bales. It was also ascertained that although the dyke and the road were one hundred and fifty yards apart on our side of the streams, they formed a junction on the enemy's bank of the creek. Finding the bridge on the road destroyed and knowing the dyke to be fully under the enemy's fire from breast works, I sent Major Pope with five companies to endeavor to effect a crossing a quarter of a mile below. Pending the result of the Major's movement, I kept up a straggling fire on the enemy's position and had the gates of the dam at the mill on the first stream stove in, in order that the water above might be lowered sufficiently to admit a crossing above the mill pond if we should not succeed at the mills or at the point below. Major Pope reported that he could not effect a passage of the creek, the enemy being in force at the crossing below. While reconnoitering the ford below, Lieut. Edw. L. Stevens was killed. I asked for a piece of artillery with which to drive the enemy from his work previous to charging across the swamp, on the dyke. The artillery was furnished and after a half dozen discharges of the gun, numbers of the enemy fled, and the five companies remaining with me charged, across the stream on the dyke in single file. The remaining enemy fled, we gained the higher bank and the fight at Boykins Mills was over.

Casualties 1st Lieut Edward L. Stevens and one man killed, and thirteen men wounded one of whom has since died.

We destroyed at this place fifty four bales of cotton, one saw and one grist mill. The army made but twelve [miles?] this day.

Moving early on the 19th we encountered the enemy at Rafting Creek. The 54th had charge of the rear this day. The enemy appeared in small numbers

in our rear, about forty or fifty men; they did not practically annoy us although they occasionally fired on the column. We made eighteen miles this day, reaching our old camp at Singleton's Plantation about 8 o'clock P.M. The fighting was now over, the enemy could not withstand our advance, it could not pass the trestle work destroyed by the 54th on the 11th. The 20th was devoted to the destruction of the captured trains. The 54th destroyed fifteen locomotives, one passenger, two box and two platform cars loaded with military stores.

Early on the 21st our forces left Singleton's Plantation and marching in a south-easterly direction made twenty miles. While at dinner news was brought to us by a flag of truce that an armistice was concluded by the opposing generals in this department. Knowing nothing but the bare fact of an armistice concluded, we felt that all was right and that peace was at hand. All our guns were discharged and cheers without number given for those who had sturdily stood by freedom in her hour of need.

On the 22nd we made twenty three miles. On the 23d a cloud settled upon us; rumors reached us that our President had been foully murdered; we at first could not comprehend it, it was too overwhelming, too lamentable, too distressing. We said quietly, "Now there is *no more* peace, let us turn back, again load our muskets and if necessary, exterminate the race that can do such things. . . ." Thus we all felt. The army made twenty seven miles this day.

On the 24th without rations, we marched twenty three miles, and the night of the 25th found us once more in Georgetown after a march on this day of twenty two miles.

The amount of property destroyed by the 54th is as follows. viz: Twenty six locomotives, seventy nine cars and their contents of stores, also trestle work bridges, tracks and rail road materials. One Machine shop valued at one million dollars (\$1,000,000), one saw mill, one grist mill, and a large quantity of cotton. The regiment also turned into the Quarter Masters Department one hundred and sixty horses and mules, many carts, and carriages of every description besides a quantity of harness.

The Army released and brought into Georgetown six thousand or more contrabands.

H. Worthey Hooper<sup>8</sup>

The regiment left Georgetown and steamed for Charleston.

## Final Service

Upon the regiment's return to Charleston, it began a quiet period of garrison duty in the city. Colonel Hallowell was in command of the city's defenses. Duty was varied; men served as train guards, sentries, or helped manage the influx of people returning to Charleston. The harbor was again open to shipping and the docks were a bustle of activity. Now the men were eagerly waiting for the opportunity to end their service and return home.

On 20 August 1865 the moment arrived. At the camp at Mount Pleasant the men of the 54th were discharged from federal service. The 54th departed Charleston on board the steamers "C. F. Thomas" and "Ashland", arriving in

Boston Harbor on 28 August. The regiment landed in Boston on 2 September and began its final march.

A local paper described the event:

"The Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment, the pioneer State colored regiment of this country, recruited at a time when great prejudices existed against enlisting any but so-called white men in the army, when a colored soldiery was considered in the light of an experiment almost certain to fail, this command—which now returns crowned with laurels, and after two hundred thousand their brethren, from one end of the traitorous South to the other, have fought themselves into public esteem—had such a reception to-day as befitted an organization the history of which is admitted to form so conspicuous a part of the annals of the country."<sup>9</sup>

The history of the 54th Massachusetts (Colored) Volunteers Regiment then drew to a close as the regiment disbanded and Rutland's contribution to the regiment came marching home.

## **A Look at the Men Who Served from Rutland**

Twenty men who were either drafted or enlisted from Rutland served in the 54th Massachusetts. Here are summations, drawn from pension records, vital records, and obituaries, of what these men did in the regiment and what they went through after their military service concluded. People may automatically think there is glory associated with warfare, but there is much greater pain and suffering.

### **Anthony, Francis**

Enlisted at age 25, 19 December 1863. Assigned as a private to Company D. Mustered out with regiment on 20 August 1865. Height 5'8". He returned after the war to live in Saratoga Springs, New York, and worked as a laborer. After some years he became afflicted with rheumatism in many joints which greatly affected his mobility and ability to work. His heart and eyesight were also failing. The government granted him a disability pension. Anthony died in Saratoga Springs 14 March 1898 of natural causes.

### **Briggs, Royal**

At age 18 enlisted 25 December 1863. Member of Company D as a private. Mustered out with rest of regiment on 20 August 1865. He became a barber and moved to Fair Haven. Died just short of his 34th birthday on 22 July 1879 from chronic alcoholism. His brother Chauncey of Castleton died in service with the regiment.

### **Brooks, James J.**

Drafted at age 23 on 22 July 1863. Arrived at Morris Island on 29 November 1863 from draft rendezvous and was assigned to Company H. Mustered out 20



*Roberts Post #14 of the Vermont Department of the Grand Army of the Republic.  
 Photographed on the steps of Memorial Hall on West Street.  
 Circled faces are ex-members of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment.*

August 1865. Height 5'11". He served actively with the regiment, but about the beginning of August 1865 he "contracted disease of the skin, manifested in an irruption on the arms, legs, and body." The skin disease prevented him from working full-time as a laborer and he applied for a pension. Brooks lived in Rutland for over ten years until moving to Westminster and Bellows Falls. He died in West Asbury Park, New Jersey, of heart failure on 8 April 1898 and was survived by his second wife, Alice Smith Brooks.

### **Brooks, William H.**

Drafted at age 28 on 5 August 1863. Was assigned to Company H upon arrival at Morris Island on 29 November 1863 from the draft rendezvous. Height 5'11 $\frac{3}{4}$ ".

The following account describes the wound he received at Olustee and the care afterwards.

At the battle of Olustee in the State of Florida, he received a gun shot wound in the hip. On Saturday the 20th day of February 1864, he retreated with others on the same day to Sanderson Station, when one of the 40th Massachusetts Regiment took him on his horse and carried him to Barber's Plantation, about 15 miles, he remained there part of the night, then went on a flat bottomed car drove by horses to Jacksonville, arrived there at 10 o'clock after noon, it being Sunday, at that place Dr. Hawks, a surgeon and four others examined the wound and probed it, but did not find the ball, they applied ice water to the wound, he remained at Jacksonville until Tuesday night, then went to Beaufort, South Carolina, in a Steam Boat, went into the Hospital at that place and remained there five weeks, the Surgeons examined the wound to find the ball while he was at Beaufort, but did not find it, a small piece of bone came out of the wound.

Given a furlough home to recuperate, Brooks returned to Vermont where fourteen more pieces of bone worked themselves out of the wound. The bullet remained in his body, lodged near the spine. Returning to the regiment in the fall of 1864 the wound still was not healed and would not sufficiently heal until March 1865. Incapable of doing military duty and after going in and out of the hospital, Brooks was given a discharge for disability at Charleston on 16 June 1865.

He was granted a pension for the disability and requested increases in his allotment for he could not do manual labor. In an affidavit, he described one effect of suffering. "I am troubled with sleeplessness and think that in each year I do not sleep more than three hours in each night, from night to night. Sometimes I have not been able to get any sleep for a week at a time."

Brooks survived through this agonizing disability until 1 December 1904 when he died in New Haven, Connecticut.

### **Freeman, John H.**

Enlisted on 16 December 1863, age 37. Assigned as a private to Company D. Died of pleuro pneumonia less than one month after arriving on the coast on 15 February 1864 at General Hospital No. 6, Beaufort, South Carolina. He was survived by his wife, Charity Freeman, who received a widow's pension.

### **Hart, George**

Enlisted at age 21 on 5 December 1863. Member of Company G. Mustered out 20 August 1865. Unlike the other Rutland enlistees, Hart was an ex-slave. He was born into slavery in Louisiana and came to Vermont with Captain Edmund A. Morse of the 7th Vermont Regiment. Morse was a resident of Rutland and had obtained leave down south after the battle at Baton Rouge in late 1862.

On the march during the Florida expedition in 1864, Hart misjudged a leap across a ditch, fell backwards, and another soldier landed on his ankle. This injury confined him to the hospital for several weeks and after the war would partially lead to a disability pension.

He married Mary Ann Wentworth in Rutland in 1866. She was the daughter of a 54th soldier from Woodstock and sister to two others. Later moving to Woodstock, he worked as both a mason and laborer. He was a member of the G.A.R. George C. Randall Post #82. Since Hart was uncertain of his birthdate, when he died of vascular heart disease on 26 February 1917, he was estimated to be between 75 and 80 years of age.

### **Hayes, Nathan E.**

Enlisted at age 44 on 10 December 1863. Assigned to duty as a private in Company H. Discharged for disability at Charleston on 16 June 1865. Height—5'9". He applied for a disability pension and his 1892 affidavit states his ailments clearly. "I contracted Chronic Diarrhea at Morris Island, S.C. in the year 1864: and I have suffered from the same more or less since that date to the present time; I also contracted rheumatism at Morris Island, S.C. by getting wet and laying on the ground and have never recovered from the same; but I have grown worse each year; I contracted scurvy in said service and I have suffered from sore legs ever since."

The log incident was supported by another affidavit which stated, "The claimant was on a detail cutting wood for the Rail Road engines and while walking on the logs, the bark slipped or turned under his feet, and he fell on a log hurting his back severely." Hayes received his pension from the government.

Hayes lived all but the very last years of his life in Rutland working mainly as a teamster. He married Margaret Freeman. He was a member of the G.A.R., Roberts Post #14 and later, George H. Ward Post #10. His youngest daughter, Harriet, married Sylvester Mero of Woodstock, another 54th veteran. Hayes died in his 91st year in Worcester, Massachusetts, on 10 April 1907 and was buried in Evergreen Cemetery.

### **Jackson, Henry P.**

Enlisted at age 32 on 11 December 1863 and served as a private in Company G. Mustered out with regiment on 20 August 1865. Height—5'2¾". Wounded in the shoulder at Olustee, 20 February 1864. After the war moved to Saratoga Springs, New York. Filed for disability pension for rheumatism contracted while in military service. A partial pension was granted as there was limited mobility in several joints. Jackson died in Saratoga Springs on 27 February 1901.



COURTESY, WOODSTOCK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*George Hart in May 1908*

### **Jackson, William**

Enlisted 19 December 1863 at age 32. Was a private in Company D. Mustered out with the regiment on 20 August 1865. Height—5'6". Contracted severe rheumatism "from exposure to damp & chilly nights & sleeping on wet ground", which limited his work as a farm laborer and wood cutter. He was married to Harriet Hunter for seven years. Jackson died 2 May 1903 when he fell off a wagon loaded with lumber and was crushed by one of the wheels.

### **Langley, John N.**

Drafted at age 25 on 22 July 1863. Arrived at Morris Island on 29 November 1863 from the draft rendezvous and was assigned to Company D. Height—5'5". While in the service his wife Caroline Jackson Langley received \$7.00 a month from Rutland to help support her in his absence.

He was an unfortunate victim in an accident which caused him to receive a discharge for disability at Beaufort, South Carolina, on 20 June 1864. Due to a noxious sore on the right leg which inhibited marching, Langley was left behind at Hilton Head while the 54th proceeded to Florida in February 1864. This was the account of the incident.

While at Hilton Head, on or about Feby 19/64. I had occasion to go to the sink and took my gun, using it in place of a cane to help me walk & that just before I reached the sink I halted to rest my leg which pained me badly, and thoughtlessly placed my foot upon the hammer guard of my gun to rest my leg, also resting my right arm on the muzzle of the gun, and while resting, my foot slipped and the next I knew I was upon my back, and in trying to get up I found my arm broken or shattered above the elbow, causing its amputation at Hilton Head before I was carried to the Hospital at Beaufort.

At the time of discharge Langley was granted a pension for his disability. He returned to Rutland, but retired from farming, buying a small house in Amherst, Massachusetts. Although capable of doing some manual labor, he was hindered by rheumatism and recurring dysentery. He died of Bright's Disease on 14 February 1910 in South Kingston, Rhode Island.

### **Langley, Loudon S.**

Enlisted at age 24 on 7 December 1863. Private in Company B. Transferred to Company K, 33rd United States Colored Troops on 4 April 1864. In early July 1864 "his Co. passed over a deep narrow ditch by means of a plank walk in crossing which he fell off striking on the small of his back causing a permanent weakness of his back." Appointed Sergeant-Major on 1 November 1864. Mustered out with regiment on 1 January 1866. Died from the effects of his injury on 28 June 1881 in Beaufort, South Carolina, and was survived by wife Jane. Two brothers served in 54th; one, Lewis W. Langley, died of disease in service.

### **Mero, Andrew H.**

Enlisted at age 27 on 9 December 1863. Private in Company B. Was absent sick in hospital when regiment was mustered out in August 1865. Upon release



from hospital was mustered out at Boston on 29 September 1865. Died at age 34 in Woodstock on 26 June 1870 from consumption.

**Mero, Charles E. W.**

Enlisted 12 December 1863 at age 22. Member Company I as a private. Mustered out on 20 August 1865. Member of the G.A.R., George H. Ward Post #10. Died from the effects of arteriosclerosis in Worcester, Massachusetts, on 6 October 1908.

**Quow, James C.**

Enlisted 5 December 1863 at age 23. Private in Company K. Mustered out with the regiment on 20 August 1865. Married Harriet Storms of Middlebury in October 1863. Died in Worcester, Massachusetts, on 24 March 1895 of pneumonia.

**Scott, George H.**

At age 18 enlisted 11 December 1863. Private in Company B. Mustered out 20 August 1865 with the regiment. Son of William Scott. Was 5'5" in height. Married in 1866 Lory Storms, sister of George F. Storms. Suffered greatly from kidney disease which was contracted by the "drinking of impure water" at Jacksonville, Florida, about 20 February 1864. Member of the G.A.R., George H. Ward Post #10. Died at age 54 from "malarial poisoning" in Worcester, Massachusetts, on 17 August 1898.

**Scott, William**

Enlisted at age 42 years of age on 12 December 1863. Private in Company I. Wounded in head at Olustee on 20 February 1864. Discharged for disability at St. Andrew's Parish, South Carolina, on 30 May 1865. Died 26 March 1873 and was survived by his wife Harriet. One of his daughters married John C. Fuller, a former 54th member who had enlisted from Bridgewater. Scott is buried in West Street Cemetery with an epitaph which reads "I have fought my last battle, I have gone to rest."

**Storms, George F.**

Enlisted 16 December 1863, age 23. Private in Company G. Mustered out 20 August 1865 with regiment. Height 5'7½". During 1865 was treated at the U.S. Hospital in Beaufort, South Carolina, for asthma, penumonia, and dysentery; health problems partially disabling him for the remainder of his life and limited his line of work to that of coachman. Married first Julia Frye who died 1878, and then Jennie Cole. Member of the G.A.R., George H. Ward Post #10. Died from a combination of asthma and heart failure in Worcester, Massachusetts, 22 April 1906, age 63.

**Weeks, John**

Enlisted at age 36 on 19 December 1863. Was a private in Company I. Mustered out with the regiment on 20 August 1865. No further record exists.

## **Williams, Cyrus**

Age 18 at enlistment on 20 November 1863. Private in Company K. Mustered out with regiment on 20 August 1865. Height — 5'6". In December 1863, several weeks after enlisting, contracted typhoid fever at Brattleboro. He was confined to the camp hospital. A severe cold accompanied the fever. After recuperating, he arrived at Morris Island to join the regiment. Once on duty he became afflicted with rheumatism and lung disease, linking them to the typhoid fever. These maladies prevented him from doing full duty and was often given light assignments. Williams did serve with the regiment until mustering out, but health problems continued to plague him after the war. He applied for a disability pension in 1885 as he was no longer capable of serving as a laborer and was the janitor of Trinity Church. He married Emily Dolby of Middlebury in 1866. Williams was a member of the G.A.R., Roberts Post #14. He died at age 54 on 3 March 1896 of endocarditis and was buried in Evergreen Cemetery.

## **Williams, John W.**

Enlisted at age 24 on 15 December 1863. Private in Company C. Mustered out 20 August 1865 with the regiment. Had married Helen Mary Quow October 1863, making him a brother-in-law to James Quow. Member of the G.A.R., Roberts Post #14. Died of pneumonia at age 57 on 2 April 1899 and was buried in Evergreen Cemetery.

## **BACK NOTES**

<sup>1</sup>Fincher, Jack, "The hard fight was getting into the fight at all," *Smithsonian*, 21 (October 1990), p. 48.

<sup>2</sup>United States War Department, *War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series III, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1899), p. 110.

<sup>3</sup>*Rutland Herald*, November 24, 1863.

<sup>4</sup>*Rutland Herald*, December 14, 1863.

<sup>5</sup>*Rutland Herald*, December 28, 1863.

<sup>6</sup>*Rutland Herald*, March 2, 1864.

<sup>7</sup>Emilio, Luis, *A Brave Black Regiment: History of the Fifty-Fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, 1863-1865*, (Boston: Boston Book Company, 1894; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1969), p. 284.

<sup>8</sup>Letter from Lt. Colonel Henry W. Hooper to Brig. General William Schouler, April 27, 1865. Massachusetts Department of Military Archives.

<sup>9</sup>Emilio, *Brave Black Regiment*, p. 321.

### FOR FURTHER READING

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- Cornish, Dudley Taylor. *The Sable Arm*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1987.
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- Heller, Charles E. "'Between Two Fires', The 54th Massachusetts." *Civil War Times Illustrated*, 11 (April, 1972), pp. 32-41.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DON WICKMAN is a resident of Rutland and became interested in this topic upon the discovery of 54th Massachusetts soldier, John Williams' gravestone in Evergreen Cemetery. He is now pursuing graduate work in History at the University of Vermont.

(Our Army Correspondence.)

From the 54th Mass. (Colored) Regt.

54th Reg't Mass. Vols.s

Jacksonville, Fla, March 9th, 1864

Editors of the Free Press:

You are aware that we (the Vermont men in this regiment) left Brattleboro Jan 23d, for I saw it stated in the *Sentinel* that "almost a mutiny occurred among the colored soldiers ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ regiment" because while the white soldiers received \$75, the black soldiers received nothing! This, although coming from the *Sentinel*, is nevertheless true. It is also true that "they" (the colored soldiers) "had expected to be treated in this respect the same as white soldiers, especially as they counted on the quota of the state."

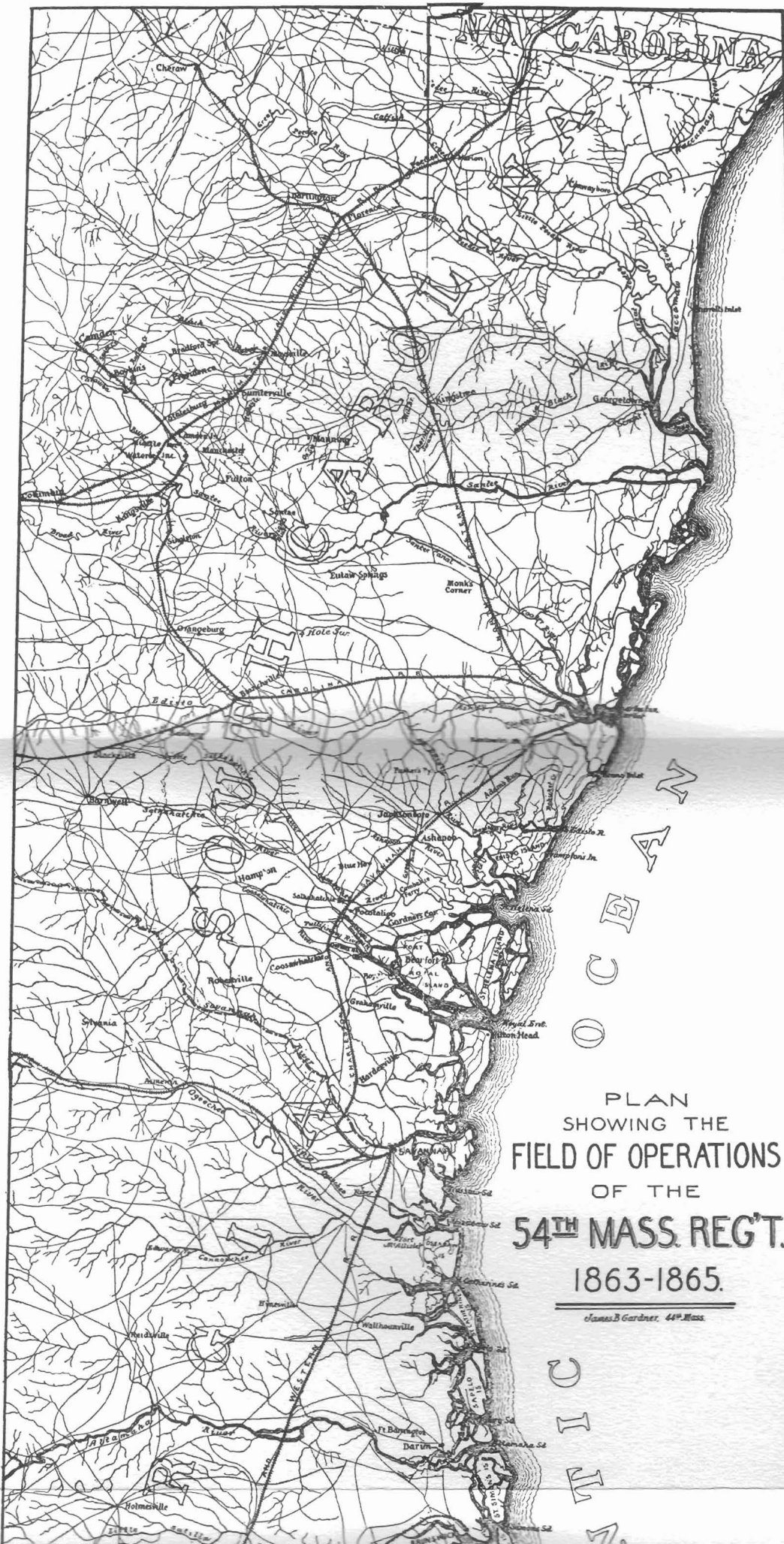
The boys (52 in number) at the time of their enlistment had been promised \$18 per month \$302 bounty and premium, and the same allowance for clothing as white soldiers. This would have entitled each man of us to the payment of \$75 before we left Brattleboro. We would have been super-human had we sustained all of the disappointment that the truth conveyed without being greatly chagrined and disposed to "mutiny." Indeed, I think I may say that, if the boys had had their arms, that every man of them would have died on the spot before leaving camp without the payment of their just due. As it was they showed unmistakable signs that they had pluck, so much that it was feared by the officers that they would have trouble with us, and so recourse had to be falsehood. We were told that, owing to our going into a regiment from another State, our \$75 had been sent to the headquarters of our regiment, where we would be paid off as soon as we arrived there!\_\_\_\_\_a falsehood that even Satan himself would blush to promulgate; but the boys, willing to believe what should be true, believed all would be right, and so the difficulty ended. Suffice it to say that we have sent a letter to our excellent Governor, J. Gregory Smith, complaining of our grievances, and asking for the interposition of his executive authority in our behalf.

We now number 44 effective men. We have six on the sick list at the different hospitals, both here and at the Head, and have lost one by death\_\_\_\_\_private John H. Freeman, whose family reside in your village, and one has been missing since the battle of Olustee (Saturday 20th ult.)\_\_\_\_\_Private Charles E. Nelson of Bristol \_\_\_\_\_and is supposed to have been captured by the enemy.

It is now over a month since we came on this expedition, and we have seen one battle and one defeat. From the time we landed in this city, until the day of the battle aforesaid, the rebels under Gen. Finnegan had not ceased to run; but the truth of the proverb that "it is a long road that never turns" was soon to be verified. On Wednesday the 16th ult. we left our camp, with a sufficient force, as was supposed, to crush all opposition, but the rebels having been largely reinforced from Georgia, were ready to give us a warm reception. On Saturday the 20th ult., we came up to the extreme front. It was about three P.M. when

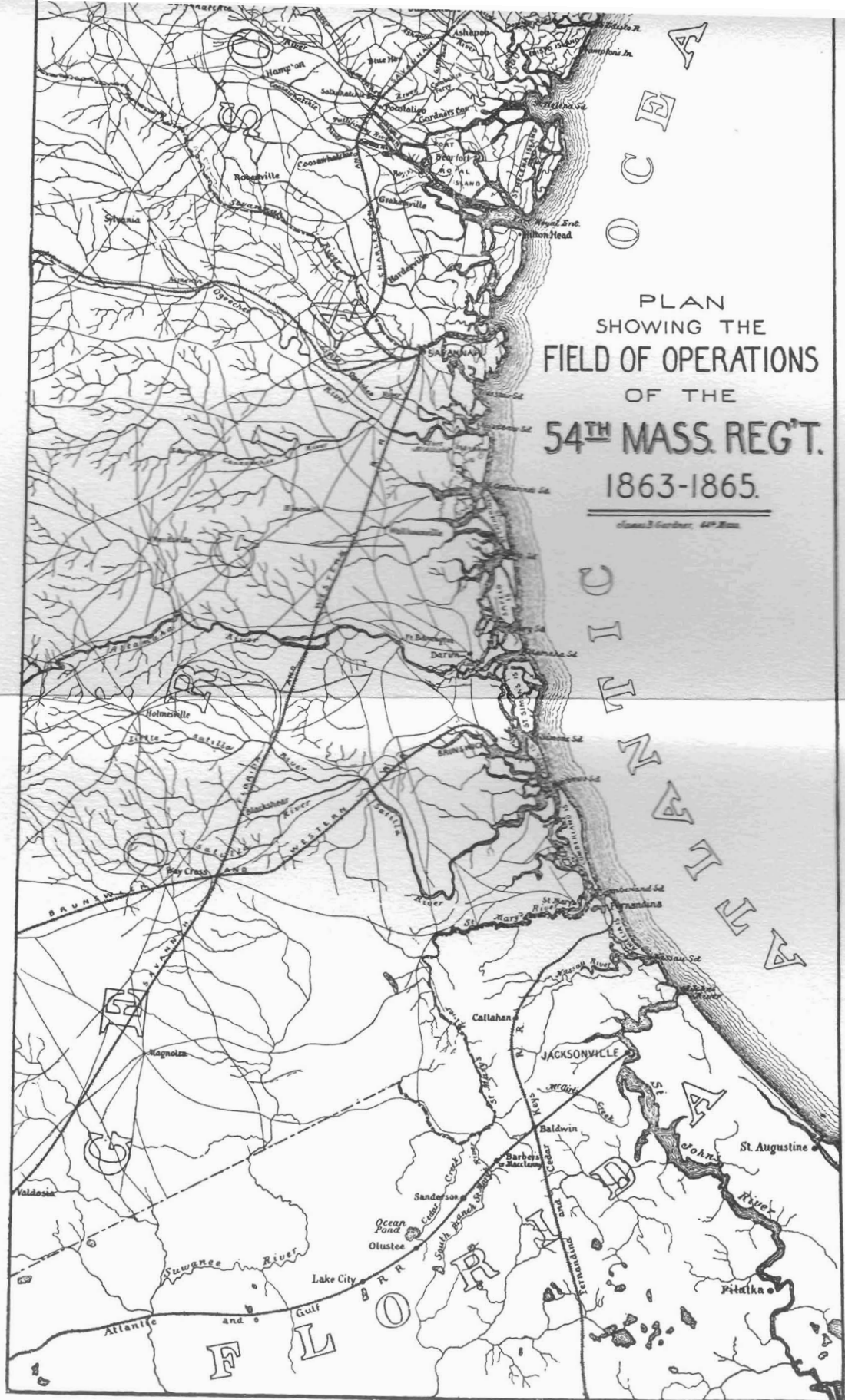
our regiment with a hearty cheer went into the fight. The enemy were strongly entrenched behind a breastwork of earth, which greatly protected them from the effect of our fire. Before we came up the rebels succeeded in capturing one of our batteries of six guns, and soon after we went into the fight they had endeavored to flank us by a regiment of rebel cavalry. We wheeled and paid our respects to them, which soon set them to a "right about face." We fought bravely (i.e. the regiment — I was not in the fight, having been ordered to the rear by the Colonel, to guard the knapsacks of our men) until we were ordered to retreat. But the men had no idea of obeying the firm order, and it was repeated by Col. Hallowell three times before the order was obeyed. The 54th was the last regiment that left the field, and they retreated in good order, as did the other regiments that participated in the fight. The loss of our regiment in killed, wounded, and missing, was 97 men. Among the wounded was Private Emery Anderson of Hinesburgh, who received a ball through his leg just above the ankle joint. Many of our wounded were left on the field, from which place they crawled along into the thick bushes to conceal themselves, and afterwards were discovered and captured by the enemy. However, quite a number were brought off, and those whose wounds were in the flesh only or about the head and arms, retreated with the rest of our army. Many of the wounded collected at a small house about three miles from the battle field, where many of them were taken in by the ambulances and wagons that came along, and that were sent back (the number was very few) after them. The latter threw out every thing almost, that they might accommodate the wounded, to keep them from being captured by the enemy, whom it was understood were pursuing us. As our men left the field, the rebels rent the air with cheer upon cheer. It was after 8 P.M. when we left the vicinity of the battle, and before we could rest, we must march back to the place we had encamped the night before, which was a distance of 15 miles. All along the road were men who had, in the hurry and confusion, lost their regiments: some helping along the wounded, while not a few of the latter were helping along themselves, and marched the entire 15 miles without any assistance. Hard tack or army bread, was very plentifully strewn along the road for the double purpose of unburdening the teams or taking in the wounded, and of feeding the numerous stragglers that lined the road, from the rear guard (the 55th Mass. colored) to the van of the army. It was about 5 A.M. before the stragglers all came in, or when the rear guard of the army came up. The men were tired and foot-sore, having marched that day 32 miles, and had fought one battle and sustained a defeat.

At six the next morning we were on our road for the station (Baldwin), where we arrived about 12 M., from which place we pushed on (for a short distance at double-quick) until we arrived at Camp Finnegan, which is only seven miles from this city. We arrived at this city on Monday evening, 22d ult. where we have been ever since, laboriously engaged in fortifying. The rebels have been as near to us as Camp Finnegan, and have once drove in our pickets, when we were immediately ordered to the entrenchments ready for a brush. But the rebels have thus far shown more wisdom than valor in threatening Jacksonville, and it is now very generally believed that if we see them we will have to go where they are.



PLAN  
SHOWING THE  
FIELD OF OPERATIONS  
OF THE  
**54<sup>TH</sup> MASS. REG'T.**  
**1863-1865.**

*James B. Gardner, 44<sup>th</sup> Mass.*



Operations of the 54th Regiment, 1863-1865

TAKEN FROM BRAVE BLACK REGIMENT

The weather here for the past few days has been very cool, but to-day it is very warm, and owing to the sudden change the heat is somewhat oppressive. The pretty and odoriferous flowers that almost everywhere greet the eyes, remind one of June weather in Vermont. The country around this city has been stripped, and both man and beast the swine in particular bear evidence of great scarcity and want, and all presents a striking contrast to the thrift and abundance that everywhere greet one in Vermont.

The boys are all pleased with the draft, because they think it more than fair for all to share in the perils of the fight, as well as in the blessings of the perfect and peaceful liberty that is sure to follow.

Louden S. Langley  
Co., B. 54th Mass. Vols.

*Burlington Free Press*, 22 March 1864



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